



# Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

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## Inside this issue:

MARCHING DOWN  
WEDDING AISLE  
COALITION PREPARES  
FOR GC 2012 1

THE CHILDREN ARE  
FREE (BOOK REVIEW) 2

NEW MFSA EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR 3

CHRISTMAS CARDS FOR  
SALE  
AUDIENCE SIZE  
INFLUENCES HOW  
STORY TOLD 4

CAN YOU COME TO  
TAMPA?  
WE REALLY NEED  
PEOPLE WHO KNOW  
DOWNTOWN TAMPA 7

AFFIRMATION MEMBERS  
CELEBRATE HOLY  
UNION 8

SANS GROUP IDS  
CLOSET RULES 9

FINALLY! WE MADE IT  
INTO CHURCH HISTORY!  
IS IT TIME TO START  
PUSHING BACK? 10

WHY THIS STUFF  
MATTERS 12

## Marching Down Wedding Aisle

May, 2011 – It was a particular moment in time. Without preplanning, without strategy firmly in place, there came an almost instantaneous effort made for the most part with very little or no collaboration, a movement of United Methodist clergy who suddenly committed their career of United Methodist ministry to the concept of a church open to all believers without second class memberships.

(Continued on page 5)

By Judy WestLee & Gary Shephard, Newsletter Co-Editors

This article makes reference to postings on UM Called Out, the Affirmation news service, by "post number". This will be a four digit number in brackets – say [3867]. A lot of the material is too lengthy to reprint in the newsletter.

Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/umcalledout/messages>. There's a box in the upper left where you can put a message number and hit enter – Yahoo will scroll

that message to the top. Or you can scroll backwards and forwards through the posts a page at a time. The Called Out messages are



Affirmation Members Celebrate Holy Union. Story on Page 8.

open to everyone, regardless of whether you subscribe to the new service or not.

There's been so much talk of acceptance of sexual

(Continued on page 5)

## Coalition Prepares for GC 2012

The General Conference will be meeting in Tampa, Florida, from April 24 to May 4, 2012. The Common Witness Coalition is planning many ways to witness to the delegates both before and during session meetings.

At SANS, the public statement, "For the Love of God and Neighbor," was released. Everyone now has the opportunity to sign on to this statement by going to [www.gc12.org](http://www.gc12.org). This coalition website will have information about our

work together to tell our stories of hope and ministry to the upcoming General Conference session.

Each week there are conference calls, emails, caucuses, trainings and

(Continued on page 7)



# The Children are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships

By Rev. Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connoley

*Book Review by Stephen Mallett, Council Co-Coordinator*

This book begins with an examination of the six Bible verses used by those wishing to claim that the Bible condemns homosexuality. There are four verses in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament which have been stripped of context and misinterpreted. The authors discuss these verses in the context of the story or section of the Bible in which they occur, as well as the culture of the time.

Like other authors and scholars (Walter Wink, et.al.) who have taken an informed look at these verses, they make a compelling argument that none of them addresses or condemns gay and lesbian Christians as we know them today. These “clobber” verses have to do with ritualistic temple prostitution, with mistreatment of those who are most vulnerable, and with God’s chosen people (Jews) following the religious practices of pagan cultures around them. While other books on the subject have stopped at this point, Miner and Connoley have only begun.

The authors then look at verses and stories in the Bible which are affirming of love between persons of the same gender. They begin with the Old Testament stories of Ruth and Naomi, as well as the story of Jonathan and David. Then they move to the New Testament with the stories of the Ethiopian eunuch and the Roman soldier’s servant. They ask, “What did Jesus mean to teach with these narratives?”

After careful examination, the authors conclude: “For the Bible could not be clearer. Everywhere the Bible confronts loving, committed homosexual relationships, they are affirmed. By contrast, the passages commonly used against gay people are all set firmly in the context of promiscuous, idolatrous sexual behavior.”

(Continued on page 3)

## Affirmation Newsletter

The Affirmation newsletter is published three times a year.

Only Affirmation’s elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

Articles for consideration for publication may be submitted to:

[AffirmationNewsletter at vahoogroups.com](mailto:AffirmationNewsletter@vahoogroups.com)\*

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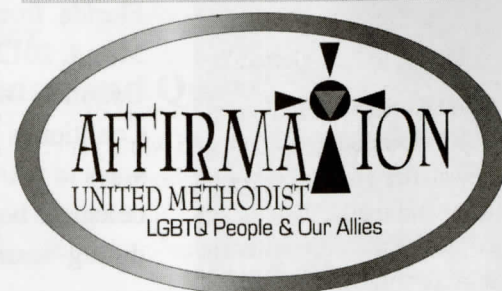
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## Mission Statement

As an independent voice of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, Affirmation radically reclaims the compassionate and transforming gospel of Jesus Christ by relentlessly pursuing full inclusion in the Church as we journey with the Spirit in creating God’s beloved community.

Adopted January 2005

\* Note: substitute the symbol “@” for the letters “\_at\_” in the email addresses.





## Welcome New MFSA Exec Director!

The Methodist Federation for Social Action's (MFSA) Board of Directors unanimously selected Jill A. Warren to serve as the next Executive Director of the organization. She began her new role on July 5, 2011.

Jill is an experienced nonprofit executive who has led agencies, taught management and leadership courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, and provided consulting services to foundations, agencies, boards of directors and nonprofit CEOs. Her faith has led her to do justice work in family violence prevention, reproductive health, and civil rights while giving boldly in her personal philanthropy to create a more just world. Jill brings a contagious level of enthusiasm and energy to her work, and MFSA is delighted to welcome her to its leadership.

MFSA is a partner with Affirmation and the Reconciling Ministries Network in the Love Your Neighbor Coalition. Together we work for justice in The United Methodist Church. Welcome to the family, Jill.

### Electronic Newsletters!

Would you like to save a tree? Would you like to receive your Affirmation newsletter in color? If the answer to either question is yes, send an email to [umaffirmation\\_at\\_yahoo.com](mailto:umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com) (replace “\_at\_” with “@”), with a subject line of “Electronic Newsletters”.

The last time we looked at the cost of a paper newsletter, a black and white paper newsletter costs roughly one dollar to print and mail. We can send out email copies of the newsletter (in color) for just a bit of time and effort.



Jill Warren

### *Children Are Free...*

(Continued from page 2)

The authors then look specifically at Jesus' approach to scripture and to the Old Testament Laws. It quickly becomes clear that Jesus, while having a deep respect for Scripture, balanced that respect with “Spirit-led discernment based on compassion and common sense.” Several examples are given in which Jesus was criticized for not following the letter of the law.

Following Jesus' death, leaders of the early Church fell into heated arguments about Gentile Christians and whether they should be required to observe the Laws of Moses. Many early Jewish Christians argued that once Gentiles were converted to Christianity, they should be required to follow all the requirements of the Old Testament Law. This debate went on with arguments back and forth for many years and can be seen as continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The authors draw a convincing parallel to the arguments we currently face about what the Church should do with gay and lesbian Christians today. While there are Christians today who claim to be literal adherents to “The Law,” it is clear that Jesus followed a different path.

This book concludes with a short chapter encouraging gay and lesbian Christians to remember that God loves us all and wants what is best for us. *The Children are Free* is a compelling, scholarly approach to Scripture, and I recommend it as a great resource for anyone struggling with the issues raised around Scripture, the church and LGBTQ Christians.



## Christmas Cards For Sale This Year!

We've always received a lot of compliments on our Christmas cards. This year for the first time we're making them available for everyone to send out. They're \$30 for 25 cards. The outside is black and white. The inside is color (trust us on this one, we know the paper newsletter is black and white).

Mail your check out to Affirmation / PO Box 1021 / Evanston IL 60204-1021 and put "Christmas Card Purchase" on the memo line. Or order on-line by going to [umaffirm.org/donate.html](http://umaffirm.org/donate.html). Put "Christmas Card Purchase" in the "Add Special Instructions to Seller" box on the second PayPal screen.



### Update Your Contact Info!

It's important for you to notify us when you move. Relying on the US Postal Service's address correction service can be iffy at best. Have you seen the print quality on the address correction labels?

It helps too if we have an up-to-date email address in case your snail mail starts coming back. In fact, in this world of instant communication, we'd really like to have your email address so that we can contact you with urgent action requests. We'll only do this if you tell us it's ok to communicate with you by email. Otherwise we'll only contact you by email if your snail mail comes back undeliverable.

To change or add to your information, email us at [umaffirmation\\_at\\_yahoo.com](mailto:umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com) [replace "\_at\_" with "@"] Subject: "Address Change" or drop us a line at: Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston IL 60204-1021.

## Audience Size Influences How Story Told

*By Stephen Mallett, Council Co-Coordinator*

Size of your target audience does matter in how we tell our story. This was one of the important lessons learned at the *Sing a New Song* (SANS) convocation.

SANS took the place of MFSA's Voices of Faith and Reconciling Ministries Convo this year. Over 600 LGBTQs and allies met in

Huron, OH in August. This conference brought together representatives of MFSA, RMN and Affirmation.

All three groups are joined in coalition and are working together preparing for General Conference next April in Tampa.

As in past convocations, SANS offered profound worship, challenging Bible study and a wide

variety of workshops, as well as opportunities to get to know and strategize with other welcoming and affirming United Methodists.

One of the workshops I attended was titled "Leading the Reconciling Process in Your Congregation."

The leader of this session was the Rev. Dr. Deborah K. Stevens, senior pastor of North Broadway

*(Continued on page 8)*



## Wedding Aisle...

*(Continued from page 1)*

minorities and marriage equality in The United Methodist Church this summer that we're quite dizzy. The news started breaking as we were finalizing our last (paper) newsletter. We asked the Called

Out editors to keep up with the news as best they could and they did a pretty good job in spite of their day jobs. Electronic media has the advantage of immediacy and not being tied to space limitations. We're not sure we can do the subject justice in the space we have

available in this newsletter, but we'll have a go.

This is a bold and gutsy move for ordained clergy to take. Clergy trials over same sex unions have resulted in loss of connection to the pastor's annual conference (aka "defrocking") to suspensions to (most recently) Amy DeLong's relatively light 20-day suspension and the requirement to write a document on clergy covenant.

There have also been trials and much uproar at times over accepting LGBTQ people into the church, and uproar over not kicking them out once they were found and outed.

Clergy in the Oregon – Idaho annual conference issued a statement titled, "We Will Not Discriminate In Our Ministries." There's much in this item that could be used as a model in other annual conferences. They state, in part, "Clergy are continuing to sign onto a statement indicating their refusal to discriminate in their ministries. The annual conference has adopted a standing resolution adopting the language of the retired bishops' Statement of Conviction as the position of the Oregon – Idaho Annual Conference." [3867]

Northern Illinois annual conference was not to be left out. "As Northern Illinois United Methodists today voted to end discrimination against LGBTQ persons in the denomination by sending petitions

## Moment in Time...

*(Continued from page 1)*

There was a collective gulp as about 1,000 United Methodist clergy signed statements that they would officiate at lesbian / gay weddings.

Talking to progressive United Methodist leaders today one learns there were "rumblings" or rumors of something coming, but it was very vague. There was no leadership on how the campaign would progress.

But by late May-early June – the time of annual conferences around the country – stories started to be printed, emails sent, statements shared. This happened in large part because of the instant communication vehicles we have today.

As of early October the best estimate of total number of United Methodist clergy signing similar statements declaring this is now their stand totaled over 1,000 in 13 Annual Conferences.

A web-based hub of communication can be found on the Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) web site – [www.rmnetwork.org](http://www.rmnetwork.org). On that home page if you click the "Act Now" tab, you can go to the "Creating an Alter for ALL." This page is meant to help folks find a contact in their Annual Conference who is willing to marry or bless couples regardless of their gender. If your Annual Conference is not listed, people can contact the RMN office directly (773-736-5526) to learn if they know of such a clergyperson in that area.

The Annual Conferences listed on that page are Baltimore Washington, California Nevada, Minnesota, New York, New England, Northern Illinois, Oklahoma, Oregon Idaho, Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountain, Tennessee, Upper New York and Western Michigan.

*(Continued on page 6)*



## Wedding Aisle...

(Continued from page 5)

to next year's global gathering, over 160 clergy have committed themselves to 'equality for all in Christian marriage and civil union.'" [3859, 3895]

California – Nevada also joined the fray. They said, in part:

"For a number of us the time has come to take stronger action to speak out against the discriminatory policies of the United Methodist Church, policies which are hurtful and hateful to our brothers and sisters in the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender communities," said The Rev. John Oda, pastor of Davis United Methodist Church and chairperson of the Reconciling Ministries Program, a denominational-wide unofficial caucus which seeks to ensure that the ministries of The United Methodist Church are open to all persons regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity. [3868]

Seventy-seven clergy members of the Minnesota annual conference said that they'd perform a marriage for any couple they found ready, including a same gender couple. [3847, 3861]

A June 26 article on Boston.com said that more than 100 clergy in New England have pledged to perform same sex marriages, in spite of the penalties they may face. [3889]

In a July 19<sup>th</sup> UMNS news article, "More clergy offer to bless same-sex unions", it says that at least 900 active and retired UM clergy have signed on to blessing such [same sex] unions. [3902]

The news has been absolutely dizzying. It's come from a number of different annual conferences. We've always thought that it should be up to the lay membership rather than the clergy to take the risks. It seems that the clergy are getting impatient with the lack of progress, however, and have decided it's time to start laying their clergy credentials on the line.

And yet, there's possibly another clergy trial coming up because an elder celebrated a "Blessing of Relationships." [3914, 3919]

We think this is the movement of the Holy Spirit saying that the time for change has come to The United Methodist Church.

UM Called Out posts referenced in this article plus a couple of others (groups.yahoo.com/group/umcalledout/messages) are 3847, 3859, 3861, 3862, 3867, 3868, 3884, 3889, 3895, 3902, 3914, and 3919.

If you don't have internet access and want to read any of the Called Out posts mentioned here, drop us a line at: Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston IL 60204-1021. We'll print the Called Out post (and the linked

article, if it's still on-line) and mail it to you.

How do we personally feel about same gender marriage? Judy and Janet WestLee had their ceremony June 18, 1994, in a United Church of Christ church. Judy didn't want to put any of her friends in the position of having charges brought against them for officiating. They both legally changed their last name the day before (from Judy Westendorf & Janet Lee to both being "WestLee." Note the capitols "L".) Judy felt she could not in good conscience hide their relationship and so ended her parish clergy career. Gary Shephard and Michael Bledsoe had their holy union Oct. 4, 1986, conducted at their home (couldn't find a brave enough United Methodist church) by a defrocked gay United Methodist clergy (couldn't find any

### New Exciting Brochures Available!

*The Affirmation brochure has been updated post GC 2008. If you'd like to help spread the word about Affirmation, let us know. We'll print and mail you a few. Keep in mind printing time. (The brochures take a fair amount of time to print.) Send an email to [umaffirmation\\_at\\_yahoo.com](mailto:umaffirmation_at_yahoo.com) (Subject: "Brochures") or drop us a line at:*

*Affirmation  
PO Box 1021  
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# Can You Come to Tampa & Join Us?

If you have the ability to come for all or part of the General Conference session, please go to the website [www.gc12.org](http://www.gc12.org) and click on the volunteer section under take action. Sign up so we know you are coming. General conference is a time for long days and high emotions.

It is also a wonderful time to build community with passionate people from around the world who have broad visions for the United Methodist Church.

If you cannot go, consider finding people in your area and sponsoring them to attend. Or you can make a tax-deductible donation to Affirmation and we will provide support to people who have the time but not the financial resources to come to Tampa.

## We're on Facebook!

Affirmation now has a Facebook page! We're posting articles, Called Out alerts, and various other things. You can find our page at [TinyURL.com/UMAffFB](http://TinyURL.com/UMAffFB).

## We Need Folks Who Really Know Downtown Tampa

In April of 2012, a wonderfully diverse group of people will arrive in Tampa Bay, FL, to witness and testify to the General Conference Session of the United Methodist Church. We

### Coalition Prepares

*(Continued from page 1)*

meetings to prepare for General Conference presence and actions. We have had some wonderful successes. To date 17 active and retired bishops have signed our statement. Work continues to expand our coalition. A new organizer to help us build relationships with the African and Philippine conferences will be added to the MFSA staff. The coalition is strategic, organized and ready to Love our Neighbors.

**LOVE YOUR  
NEIGHBOR**

will be traveling from all over the country to be present.

With our geographically diverse coalition it's important to have some local contacts in Tampa. Here are some of the things we will need:

1. People who can house coalition members who cannot afford hotel space.
2. People who have contacts with the food and restaurant industry.
3. People who are willing to help with organizing office and technical support.
4. People who are willing to participate in flash mobs or demonstrations.
5. People with contacts in the mental health field so we have places to refer those needing extra help during conference.
6. People who know where to get a charger for a particular

phone, know where the local party supply store is or know where the local office supply store is. You just can't imagine what we're all going to need or what's going to get left at home. You just can't imagine how important your knowledge of the area is to someone from out of town.

7. People to get up early and hand out newsletters to GC delegates.
8. Finally, people who would like to hang out and have fun while volunteering with the coalition.

If you have contacts in the Tampa area please get in touch with them. If they are interested in helping have them email Walter Lockhart at [REDACTED] (replace the \_at\_ with @) or they can snail mail c/o Walker Community UMC, PO Box 7588, Minneapolis, MN 55407.



# Affirmation Members Celebrate Holy Union

Jan Olson and Nancy Hensley celebrated a Holy Union in a suburb of Chicago on Sept. 10, 2011.

Although Jan and Nancy feel their partnership has been a marriage in the eyes of God throughout their 17 ½ years together it has now become legal since Illinois passed a Civil Union law that went into effect on June 1, 2011.

The ceremony was held in a United Methodist Church and was officiated by a United Methodist minister. The couple was surrounded in love by over 100 friends and family members who attended the ceremony. Among the guests were long time Affirmation members Kathryn Mitchem, David Gunnell and Morris Floyd. Jan has

been the Affirmation treasurer for many years.

After the ceremony, the couple had a mini-honeymoon in Lake Geneva, WI. They are looking forward to their trip-of-a-lifetime to the Galapagos in October.



## Audience Size...

*(Continued from page 4)*

UMC in Columbus, OH. This church recently became a Reconciling Congregation under her leadership.

I learned two important lessons about successful strategies which can help bring a church and congregation forward into becoming a Reconciling UMC. Both of these lessons brought home to me the concept that size really does matter.

Rev. Stevens emphasized the importance of one on one conversations in our quest to change hearts and minds. However, this strategy requires adjustment based on the size of the congregation.

In a small church, it may be possible to have one to one conversations with every member of the church. It would be extremely hard to do this in a large church so this strategy must be altered.

In most large congregations there exists a number of groups: Sunday school classes, circles, committees, prayer groups, etc.

The task of the Reconciling Committee is to identify these various groups and to identify the leaders in each group. The actual leader(s) of any group might be the chair or president; however, there could also be others who may not be formally identified or elected but who are influential when they take a stand.

A reconciling process then would emphasize one to one conversations with these leaders, who then hopefully would help move their group forward. The strategy for medium size congregations would include a combination of conversations with group leaders as well as some other members not necessarily identified as leaders.

The second lesson about size from this workshop has to do with statistics about how congregations adopt change.

In a typical congregation there will be a small percentage of members identified as “early adopters”. These are people who quickly open their hearts and minds to change once they understand that we are all called as Christians to be radically hospitable.

Typically there is another small group we can identify as “never adopters” who persist in opposing change. These groups are familiar if we look back at the struggles for racial and gender equality over past decades.

People may oppose their church declaring itself Reconciling because they fear that some people (the never adopters) might leave the church. However, a church that uses this reasoning to avoid becoming reconciling is likely to lose its early adopters over time.

The size of these groups is typically similar, and so a church is quite likely to lose approximately the same number of members either way.



# SANS Group IDs Closet Rules

**By Jeanne Knepper, Former Council Member**

I facilitated the SANS affinity group for people who identify as closeted. Six participants joined me in the conversation, with each of us sharing about our lives and context. None of the participants identified as trans.

Participants discussed why they chose not to be forthcoming about their sexual orientation, the strengths, drawbacks, payoffs and costs of those choices. Some were partially out, some were now out but had lived closeted for years, some were new to self-understanding and others had struggled for years with feeling "less than."

All expressed an experience of call to be in ministry and a fear that they couldn't live out that call if they identified themselves.

Some believed they accomplished a great deal more for the common movement of liberation from a closeted position than they would have been able to had they been identified.

We discussed the concentric circles of the closet, who they were out to, and who they still hid from. Some named that it was hardest to be open with family while others found support from their family members,

but were closeted in their professional lives.

Several acknowledged that being closeted carried the dangers of depression and of turning to self-destructive behavior – excessive use of alcohol or drugs, anonymous sex, isolation, consideration of suicide – and a perpetual sense of being alone and unknown.

## *Walter Muses about SANS...*

*I have not been to an RMN or MFSA national event in several years. The trip to the shores of Lake Erie was certainly a high point for me.*

*It was wonderful to be on stage with MFSA and RMN as we publicly proclaimed the Common Witness Coalition is organized to show the Gospel message of Love your Neighbor.*

*Affirmation is at the table, on the stage and working to ensure that all voices are heard as we live out and teach the Great Commission for General Conference.*

We observed that the experience of living closeted is different for extroverts and introverts.

As we talked, we drew some conclusions that might be of use to others who identify as closeted:

- Be clear about why you are choosing the closet for now – what is your context, what are the dangers, what do you protect, and how do you live out your calling from this position?
- Be sure you have some people in your life who know who you are, support you and your decision to be closeted for now, however long "now" is, and are available when you need to vent, cry, celebrate or just be real for a while.
- Be aware that while coming out may require immediate courage, living closeted and healthy takes a great deal of clarity, determination and long lasting courage, the courage to deal with a deep loneliness and stay true to your calling and your well being.
- It's important to steadily refute any self-judgment / homophobia that tells you that you are "less than" heterosexual, gender obvious people, or that God wants you to be other than who you are.
- Think hard about your own practice of integrity, as complicated and reality based as it may be, and refrain from making decisions that

*(Continued on page 10)*



# Finally! We Made It Into Church History!

*By Jeanne Knepper, Former Council Member*

For years, the only mention of homosexuality in the study of Methodist history has been Vivian Green's brief reference to John Wesley's ministry to a prisoner named Blair, charged with sodomy, in his short biography of Wesley.

A new tome, *The Methodist Experience in America: A History Volume 1*, by Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, devotes two sections, "Homosexuality: Cause and Caucus" and "Homosexuality: Reconciliation, Transformation or Schism?" to the people who spoke up and formed Affirmation and to the issue as it played out at General

conferences between 1972 and 2000.

It's a good presentation, with names of our founders and saints, and lays the issues out in a fair and comprehensive way. This is likely to be the book from which the next generation of United Methodist seminarians and ministers learns church history. Woo-hoo!

## Is It Time to Start Pushing Back?

*By Gary Shephard, Newsletter Co-editor*

It's been a hard thing, really. Some anti-LGBTQ organization

### Closet Rules...

*(Continued from page 9)*

undermine your values and sense of integrity.

- Consider whether there are time or context considerations for the length of time you will be closeted.
- Maintain an active spiritual life that reinforces and explores God's complete knowledge of, and unconditional love for you.
- Know that living closeted is a hard choice that may be the best choice for you in your time and context, and seek in all things to take good care of yourself.

says something outrageous about LGBTQ people and we ignore it. We're supposed to ignore it. We really are. Engaging them about their hate speech only escalates the struggle, gives them credence if we don't think out our words very carefully and wastes our own extremely limited resources.

And it's not part of the organizational structure that says "model the church we want to see".

Even when, say, UMAction reported that Karen Damann was at the RMN worship service at GC 2004 in Pittsburg when it was actually Karen Oliveto, we just sniffed haughtily, and congratulated ourselves that we knew the truth. I so wanted to put a small article in the Affirmation daily GC newsletter pointing out

the error in a non-judgmental way. I was talked out of it.

Recently (August,) the Family Research Council (listed as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center) and MassResistance insinuated that GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) created and distributed a safer sex pamphlet (intended for adult gay males) to school children. It was, of course, not true.

Lawyers for GLSEN responded with a cease-and-desist letter delivered to the Family Research Council.

Well. About time. When someone starts attacking GLSEN with such vitriolic and potentially reputation destroying nonsense,

*(Continued on page 11)*



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\* Note: substitute the symbol "@" for the letters "\_at\_" in the email addresses above.

**Push Back...**

*(Continued from page 10)*

GLSEN has to push back. Their entire organizational structure is at stake. One could make the argument that GLSEN should have left the safer sex pamphlet to an adult oriented organization, but if GLSEN saw something that they felt needed to be addressed, why shouldn't they be free to address it?

Is it time for all of our organizations to start pushing back? Has all of this hate speech just gone too far?

The head of the National Organization for Marriage (NOM), another anti-LGBTQ hate group, says that marriage equality could lead to acceptance of pedophilia. Never mind that there's no link between same sex attraction and pedophilia, and that most pedophiles identify as heterosexual. That's another headline from August, 2011.

Three candidates for the Republican GOP presidential nomination have signed on to a campaign pledge prepared by NOM. There are several anti-LGBTQ items in the pledge, including "a promise to 'investigate' gay Americans if elected president." Again, this broke in August, 2011. Not 1956. Not 1965. August, 2011.

Huh? Investigate us for what? Our superior interior design skills? Our gym buffed bodies? Grill us for Aunt Martha's biscuit recipe? How we won the speed tire changing competition?

And yet just a few weeks ago, New York state passed marriage equality.

Are these just the death rattles of a hate movement that will be an interesting read in the history books a few years from now? Or is this the beginning of an evil path that will lead to an ultra right-wing "blame everything on sexual

minorities" society that'll make the Third Reich look like a Sunday School picnic?

Personally, the Family Research Council, MassResistance, National Organization for Marriage and their ilk scare the living hell out of me.

If these organizations are on their last generation of supporters and will die when their funds dry up and blow away, maybe we can help speed up the process by challenging them at every opportunity. On the other hand, if they succeed in reversing the improvements we've gained since Stonewall in 1969 and force us back underground for our very lives, it'll be a very bad thing.

I'd rather not take the risk myself. I've lived that life underground. It's not a healthy or safe place to be.

I say we take off the kid gloves and start defending ourselves.



# Affirmation

An Independent Voice for:  
United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

## Why This Stuff Matters

By Gary Shephard, Newsletter Co-editor

I forget now why I first picked up *heterosexism in contemporary world religion*. It doesn't sound like light reading and it's not. But how can you put down a book that in the second paragraph of the introduction contains, "Homophobia has, in irony, been called 'the last respectable prejudice,' but, of course, no prejudice merits respect."

It's an odd world we live in. On the one hand, New York state legalizes same gender marriage, and Rhode Island approves same gender civil unions. On the other hand, there are people worried about the Statue of Liberty being an idol used for demon worship. (Wish I could say I was making that up about Lady Liberty, but unfortunately I'm not.) There's news that Michele Bachmann's husband runs a clinic that practices reparative therapy, although they will neither confirm or deny. And Michele is running for the Republican presidential nod? I threatened to emigrate to Canada when George W. Bush was elected. Maybe I'd better start pricing homes in Australia. (Joking!)

And guess what turned up the other day? A brochure produced by the Alert Citizens of Texas in 1983. It's titled "The Gay Plague" and is full of alarming but false information, most of it sourced from Paul Cameron. Cameron, if you're not familiar with the name, has been spreading outright lies about sexual minorities for decades. It would be an interesting relic from almost 30 years ago, except that we're hearing the same claptrap today even as we pick up marriage equality here and civil unions there.

The anti-sexual minorities Ugandan Bill 18 died without being passed, fortunately. But there's been a crackdown in Ghana against sexual minorities.

We can't let ourselves get carried away with thinking that finally the tide is turning and it's just a matter of time. Until every last voice against sexual minorities is still and our rights are assured *worldwide*, we need to stay on the alert. We need to keep volunteering for and supporting with our checkbooks the organizations that bring to light those who would continue to classify us as unnatural, and who've "made the wrong choice." We need to continue working for first class citizenship and freedom from oppression for all.

**THE GAY  
PLAGUE**  
*Homosexuality and Disease*

**ACT**  
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